

# COVID-19 and Unemployment

## Assessing the Early Fallout for Immigrants and Other U.S. Workers

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### Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting lockdowns have been devastating for U.S. workers across the spectrum, with some industries and groups hit far harder than others. More than 40 million jobs were lost between mid-March and late May, and unemployment is projected to reach as high as 25 percent—a level unseen since the Great Depression of 1929-39. Initial job losses have been exceptionally high among immigrants, particularly Latinos. During the prior recession in 2008-09, Latino immigrants also faced more job loss up front, but their employment rebounded more quickly than it did for U.S.-born workers. It remains to be seen if this economic crisis will follow the same pattern.

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Then and now, immigrants are among the most affected by labor market dislocations because of their relative youth, low levels of formal education, and in particular their concentration in service industries such as retail trade and leisure and hospitality (e.g., hotels, restaurants, bars, and amusement parks). Most jobs in these industries have been deemed

nonessential and require face-to-face interaction, making them vulnerable to state and local lockdowns. Between January and April 2020, all major racial/ethnic groups encountered substantial job losses, but immigrants saw a much faster rise in unemployment than U.S.-born workers.

Drawing on monthly U.S. Census Bureau data from January, before the coronavirus affected the labor market, and April, the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) finds higher unemployment among immigrants is strongly related to the industries in which they worked before the pandemic. Within almost every industry, unemployment in April (which was officially recorded at 14.7 percent) was nearly as high among U.S.-born workers as immigrants. This was particularly true in the hardest-hit industries of leisure and hospitality (38 percent for natives versus 39 percent for immigrants); personal and other services (21 percent versus 26 percent); and retail trade (18 percent versus 20 percent). But immigrant workers were more heavily concentrated than U.S.-born workers in these industries.

Even as immigrants broadly and those in certain job sectors have been hit hard, an important feature of the current economic crisis so far is its disproportionate impact on certain demographic groups: Latinos, immigrant women, and, regardless of nativity, less-educated workers and those under the age of 25.

In April, immigrant women, except for those who are Black, had higher unemployment rates than men within every major racial/ethnic group. Latina immigrants had the highest jobless rate: 22 percent, double the 11 percent rate for U.S.-born White men. Black immigrant women fared far better, with a jobless rate of 11.5 percent—below the relatively high rate of about 16.4 percent for Black men regardless of nativity.

Thus far, unemployment rates have been relatively low among White and Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) workers, regardless of their nativity.

The least educated workers have been among those most affected by pandemic-related job loss to date. April's unemployment rate exceeded 20 percent for all U.S. workers ages 25 and older without a high school diploma, with little difference between immigrants and U.S.-born workers. By comparison, 10 percent of immigrants with a four-year college degree were unemployed, just above the 8 percent rate for their U.S.-born peers.

Job loss has been especially severe among young workers. Immigrant workers ages 16 to 24 faced a 30 percent unemployment rate in April, while U.S.-born workers in this age range were not far behind, at 27 percent. These rates were double those for workers ages 25 and older.

In sum, the pandemic has generated widespread job losses among both immigrants and U.S.-born workers from a variety of backgrounds. Losses have been steepest—approaching half of all workers—in several nonessential service sectors that employ large numbers of immigrant workers and generally require relatively low levels of formal education. But these job losses also occurred in almost all sectors across the economy. If the past recession is any guide, Latino immigrants may be the most vulnerable workers in the short term, but they may also be

among the first workers called back when the labor market recovers.

## 1 Introduction

The pandemic and stay-at-home orders imposed to contain the coronavirus resulted in the loss of more than 40 million jobs between mid-March and late May 2020,<sup>1</sup> causing the official unemployment rate to surge from 4.4 percent in March to 14.7 percent just one month later.<sup>2</sup> Leading economists and Trump administration officials suggested the rate could reach as high as 25 percent.<sup>3</sup>

This fact sheet compares unemployment patterns between January and April 2020 for U.S. workers, native born and immigrant alike. It describes trends along important dimensions such as gender, race/ethnicity, educational attainment, age, and industries of employment, helping explain some of the gaps between foreign-born and U.S.-born workers. To conduct the analysis, Migration Policy Institute (MPI) researchers drew data from the U.S. Census Bureau's monthly Current Population Survey (CPS)—the federal government's main source of statistics on nationwide employment trends. (MPI has also developed an interactive data tool to show trends in unemployment rates since January 2019 by nativity, gender, race/ethnicity, educational attainment, and industry. [Click here](#) to access the data tool.)

In order to place the current economic downturn in the context of prior recessions, and to anticipate what the coming months may bring for U.S. workers, this fact sheet compares current trends to those experienced during the 2008-09 recession and its aftermath. During that earlier recession, immigrants and particularly Latino immigrants, initially experienced sharper increases in unemployment than other workers, but soon saw their jobless levels align with those of others. Latina immigrants, however, experienced higher unemployment than other

groups throughout the recession.<sup>4</sup> (For more on the earlier recession, see Box 1.)

In March 2020, MPI showed that immigrants were heavily concentrated in some of the industries that appeared most vulnerable to large job losses: accommodation and food services, in-home services, and building services.<sup>5</sup> In accommodations and food services (a sector that includes hotels, other lodgings, bars, restaurants, and catering services), 45 percent of jobs (6.3 million) were lost between March and April, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data. The share was higher in personal services, with a loss of 53 percent of jobs (797,000).<sup>6</sup> MPI also highlighted sectors deemed essential to the COVID-19 response—including those that provide health care, food, and other basic goods and services to the U.S. population—all of which employ

large numbers of immigrants.<sup>7</sup> Even some of these frontline industries lost jobs in April: for instance, the health-care industry lost 9 percent of jobs (1.4 million) in this period.<sup>8</sup>

## 2 Unemployment Trends by Nativity and Gender

Immigrants experienced a greater increase in unemployment during the first months of the pandemic than U.S.-born workers, and women regardless of origin experienced a steeper rise than men.<sup>9</sup> In January 2020, before the coronavirus outbreak had been widely detected in the United States or was declared a global pandemic,<sup>10</sup> unemployment averaged about 4 percent and there was little variation—less than 1 percentage point—by nativity or gender (see

### BOX 1 Immigrant Workers in the 2008-09 Recession

The 2008-09 recession and its aftermath initially caused more unemployment among immigrants than the U.S. born, before leveling back to similar levels, prior Migration Policy Institute (MPI) research shows.

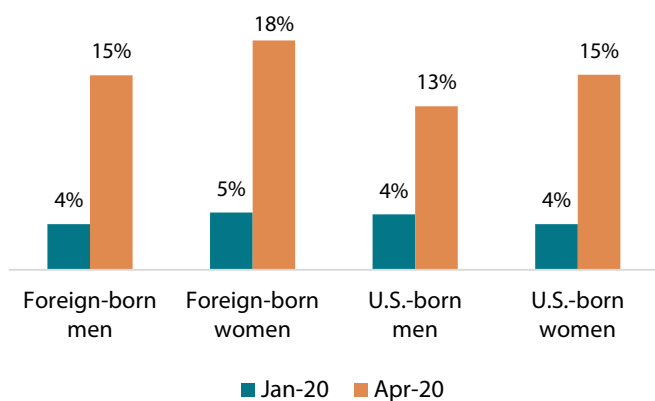
Latino immigrants experienced the steepest initial increase in unemployment during that recession—peaking at almost 14 percent in the first quarter of 2010. MPI analysts attributed higher initial unemployment among immigrants in general and Latino immigrants in particular to their younger age, lower educational attainment, relative recency in the labor force, and concentration in cyclical industries such as construction, leisure and hospitality (which includes arts, entertainment, recreation, restaurants, bars, hotels, and other accommodations), and retail trade. In the second quarter of 2010, however, unemployment among Latino immigrants fell to about 10 percent—the same level as all U.S.-born workers. Unemployment trends were similar for immigrants and natives without a high school degree and for those who were ages 16 to 26.

Another key finding from MPI's analysis was persistently high unemployment among Latina immigrants. Their unemployment exceeded pre-recession joblessness for U.S.-born women and immigrant women in other racial/ethnic groups, rose more steeply during the economic downturn, and did not fall back as quickly to the level experienced by immigrants overall as well as for other women. Throughout the recession, however, their unemployment rate was only slightly higher than that for Latino immigrant men.

Source: Demetrios G. Papademetriou, Madeleine Sumption, and Aaron Terrazas, *Migration and Immigrants Two Years after the Financial Collapse: Where Do We Stand?* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2010), 28-33.

Figure 1).<sup>11</sup> But in April, there was much more variation, with a 5-point spread between the highest unemployment rate (18 percent for immigrant women) and the lowest (13 percent for U.S.-born men). This is a somewhat different pattern from that observed during the 2008-09 recession when job losses were somewhat greater for men than women.<sup>12</sup>

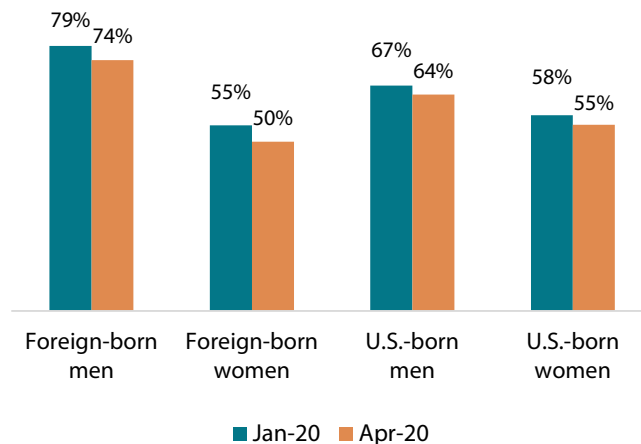
**FIGURE 1**  
**Unemployment Rates of Adults (ages 16 and older) in the U.S. Civilian Labor Force, by Nativity and Gender, January-April 2020**



Source: Migration Policy Institute (MPI) analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s January 2020 and April 2020 monthly U.S. Current Population Survey (CPS).

Labor force participation also fell as job losses mounted, because some workers who lost jobs stopped looking for work, out of pessimism about their chances of finding work in the current context or out of fear of contracting COVID-19 in a new workplace.<sup>13</sup> Between March and April, overall labor force participation fell by nearly 3 percentage points, to 60 percent—the lowest since January 1973.<sup>14</sup> This is part of a long-term trend of declining labor force participation since the 2008-09 recession. Between January and April 2020, immigrants’ labor force participation dropped relatively quickly: by about 4 percentage points for men and 5 points for women. But immigrant men continued to have the highest labor force participation rate (see Figure 2).

**FIGURE 2**  
**Labor Force Participation Rates of Adults (ages 16 and older) in the U.S. Civilian Labor Force, by Nativity and Gender, January-April 2020**



Source: MPI analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s January 2020 and April 2020 monthly CPS.

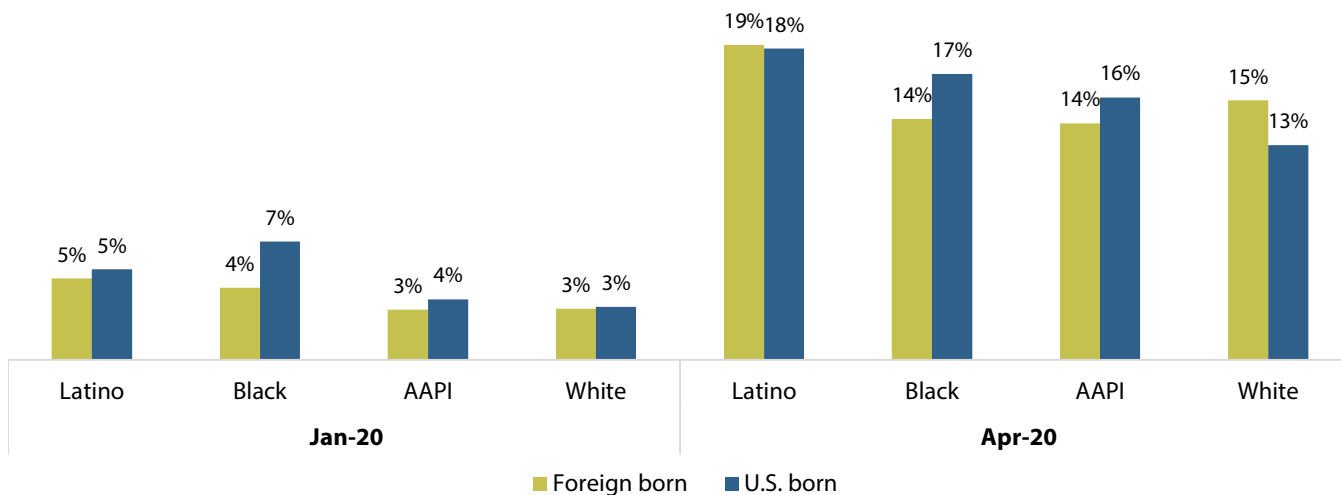
### 3 Unemployment Trends by Race and Ethnicity

Before the pandemic, unemployment was lower among immigrants than natives in every major racial/ethnic group. But since the pandemic took hold, unemployment has risen faster for immigrants than U.S.-born workers.

Between January and April, unemployment surged the most for Latinos—U.S. born and immigrant alike (see Figure 3). In April, Latinos overall had the highest unemployment rate, followed by non-Latino Black, Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI), and White workers.<sup>15</sup> The April unemployment rate was higher for immigrants than natives among White workers, but lower among AAPI and Black workers, while the two groups showed similar rates among Latino workers. Relatively low unemployment among AAPI and Black immigrants may reflect the fact that they tend to be well educated, hold professional jobs, and therefore are somewhat insu-

FIGURE 3

**Unemployment Rates of Adults (ages 16 and older) in the U.S. Civilian Labor Force, by Race/Ethnicity and Nativity, January-April 2020**



Source: MPI analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s January 2020 and April 2020 monthly CPS.

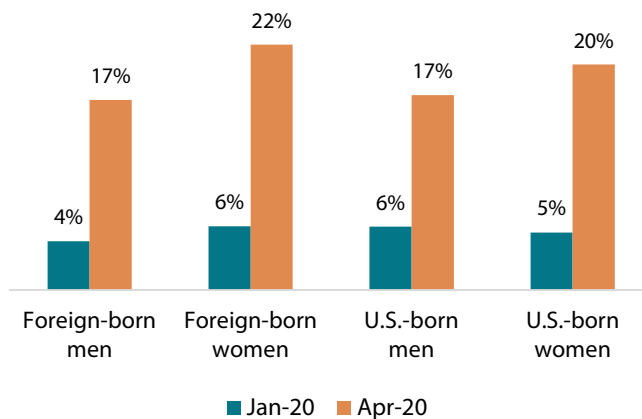
lated from job losses. Nonetheless, every major racial/ethnic group experienced substantial job losses, with their unemployment rate increasing by at least 9 percentage points.

There were also substantial differences in unemployment rates between men and women among almost all the major racial/ethnic and nativity groups in April. Among Latinos, immigrant women had the highest jobless rate within the group (22 percent, see Figure 4). Workers regardless of nativity experienced a gender gap in unemployment, one that was greater for immigrants (5 percentage points) than natives (2 points). There was a much greater 30-percentage point gap in labor force participation between Latino immigrant men and women (78 percent versus 49 percent—not shown here). When the unemployment rate is considered alongside the labor force participation rate, only 38 percent of working-age Latina immigrants were employed in April. Such low labor force participation and high unemployment for women implies that many Latino im-

migrant families have only one worker: a long-term trend exacerbated by the current economic crisis.

FIGURE 4

**Unemployment Rates of Latino Adults (ages 16 and older) in the U.S. Civilian Labor Force, by Nativity and Gender, January-April 2020**

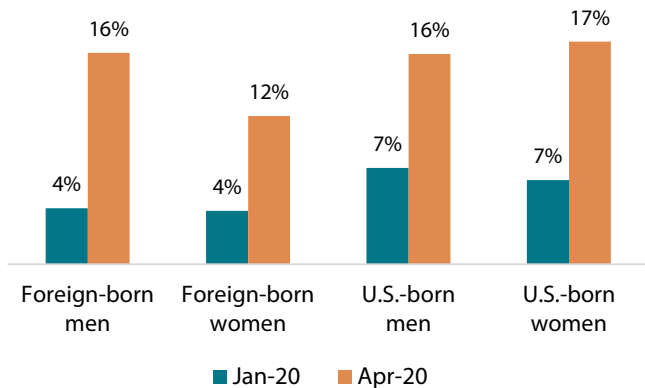


Source: MPI analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s January 2020 and April 2020 monthly CPS.

The unemployment pattern between the genders is the opposite for Black immigrants than Latinos.

Within the Black population, the April unemployment rate was lowest among foreign-born women; it was one of the lowest of any group, regardless of race/ethnicity, nativity, or gender, at 11.5 percent (see Figure 5). Men had relatively equivalent unemployment rates, regardless of nativity. When it comes to labor force participation, however, foreign-born Black men had the highest rate (74 percent versus 60 percent or less for immigrant women and the U.S. born of both genders.)

**FIGURE 5**  
**Unemployment Rates of Non-Latino Black Adults (ages 16 and older) in the U.S. Civilian Labor Force, by Nativity and Gender, January-April 2020**



Source: MPI analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s January 2020 and April 2020 monthly CPS.

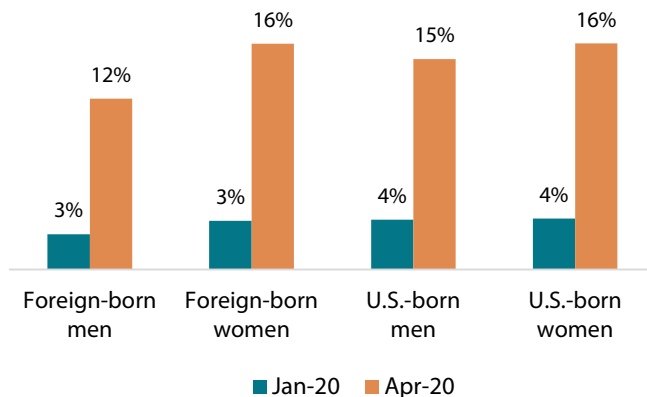
Unemployment rates were generally lower for AAPI and White workers, but they showed the same gendered patterns as Latinos, with higher unemployment among women (see Figures 6 and 7).

In April, two of the groups with the lowest unemployment rates were U.S.-born White men (11 percent) and AAPI immigrant men (12 percent); the third was Black immigrant women (11.5 percent).

In sum, in April, all of the major racial/ethnic and gender groups, regardless of nativity, described here had double-digit unemployment rates—ones exceeding the worst troughs of the 2008-09 recession.

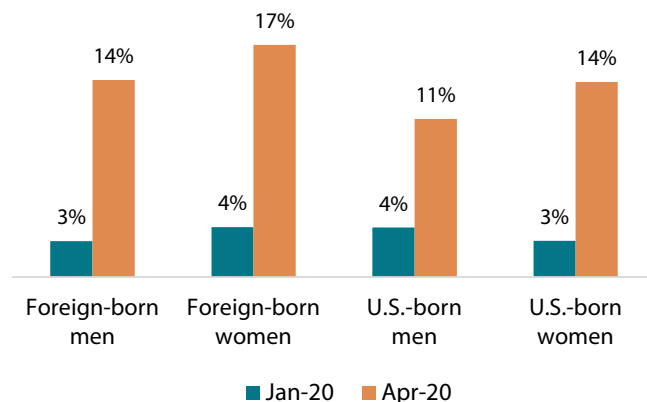
But there were significant gaps in these rates, with unemployment among Latina immigrants exceeding that of U.S.-born White men and Black immigrant women by about 10 percentage points.

**FIGURE 6**  
**Unemployment Rates of Non-Latino Asian American and Pacific Islander Adults (ages 16 and older) in the U.S. Civilian Labor Force, by Nativity and Gender, January-April 2020**



Source: MPI analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s January 2020 and April 2020 monthly CPS.

**FIGURE 7**  
**Unemployment Rates of Non-Latino White Adults (ages 16 and older) in the U.S. Civilian Labor Force, by Nativity and Gender, January-April 2020**



Source: MPI analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s January 2020 and April 2020 monthly CPS.

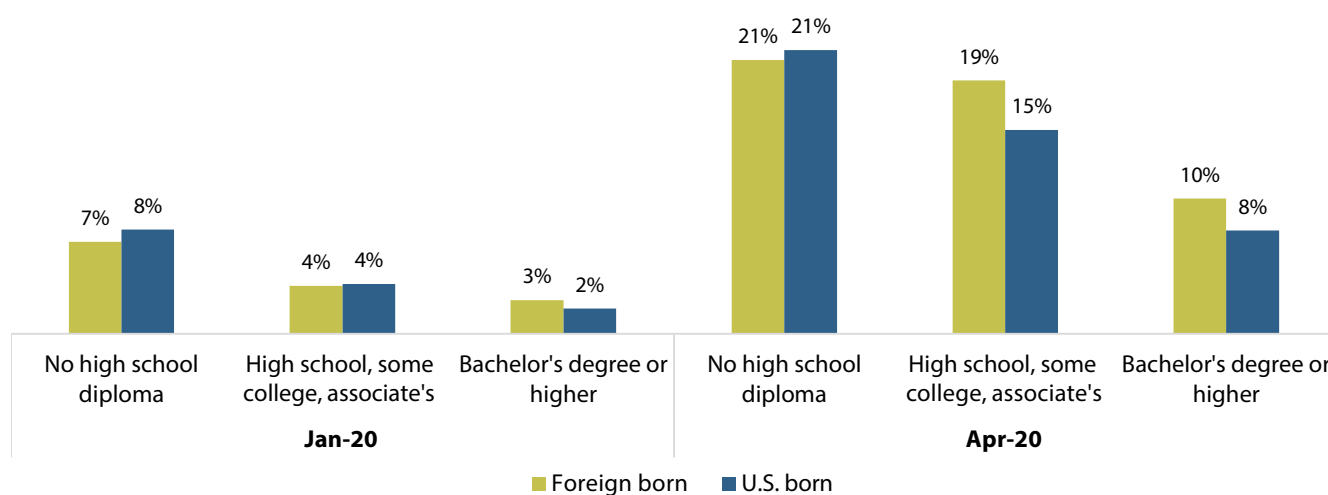
## 4 Unemployment Trends by Educational Attainment

The relatively high unemployment of immigrant workers may in part be explained by their relatively low educational attainment. In April, less-educated workers were much more likely to be unemployed than better-educated ones, just as with the last recession. (They were also more likely to be unemployed in January, before the pandemic was declared, but the gap widened substantially by April). All U.S. workers without a high school diploma had an unemployment rate of 21 percent, more than double the 8 percent for those with at least a four-year college degree. Among those without a high school education, unemployment rates were similar for immigrants and natives, but foreign-born workers with higher levels of formal education were

more likely to be unemployed than similar U.S.-born workers (see Figure 8). It is worth noting that even after the initial onset of the pandemic, U.S.-born workers with at least a four-year college education still had unemployment rates below 10 percent. This may be because so many professional jobs requiring high levels of formal education can be performed remotely at home during lockdowns and stay-at-home orders.

Women had higher unemployment rates than men at all levels of education (see Figure 9). One-quarter of women without a high school diploma were unemployed in April, regardless of their nativity. At higher levels of education, immigrant women were the most likely to be unemployed, followed by immigrant men. The lowest unemployment rate of any group was 7 percent—among U.S.-born men with at least a four-year college degree.

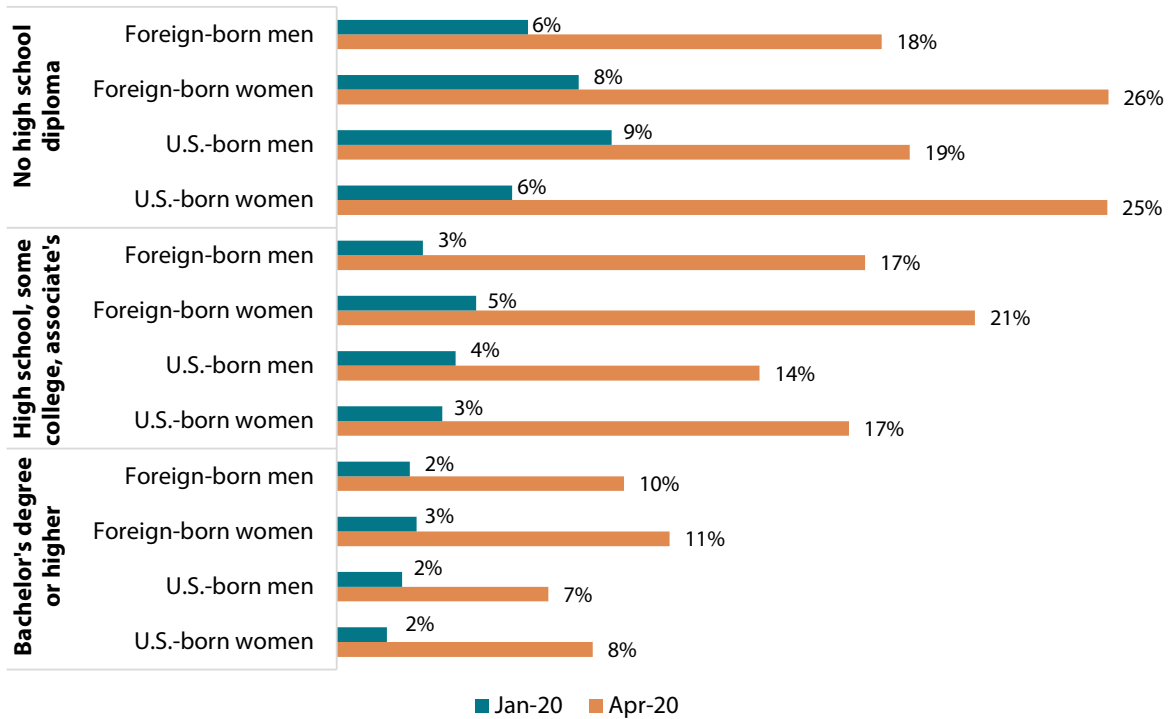
**FIGURE 8**  
**Unemployment Rates of Adults (ages 25 and older) in the U.S. Civilian Labor Force, by Educational Attainment and Nativity, January-April 2020**



Source: MPI analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's January 2020 and April 2020 monthly CPS.

FIGURE 9

**Unemployment Rates of Adults (ages 25 and older) in the U.S. Civilian Labor Force, by Educational Attainment, Nativity, and Gender, January-April 2020**



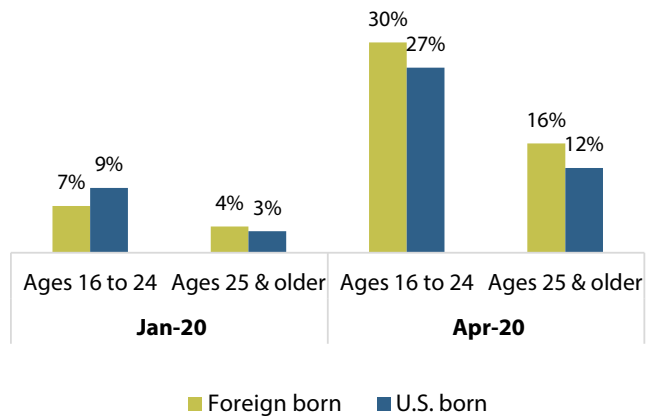
Source: MPI analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's January 2020 and April 2020 monthly CPS.

## 5 Unemployment Trends by Age

In April, young adults ages 16 to 24 were about twice as likely to be unemployed as those ages 25 and older—a pattern which also matches the 2008-09 recession. This pattern held for immigrants as well as U.S.-born workers (see Figure 10). In January, before the pandemic hit, young U.S.-born workers were more likely to be unemployed than young immigrants (by more than 2 percentage points). In April, this pattern was reversed, with the unemployment rate higher among young immigrants (by more than 3 percentage points). Thus, job losses appear particularly steep among the youngest immigrant workers.

FIGURE 10

**Unemployment Rates of Adults in the U.S. Civilian Labor Force, by Age Group and Nativity, January-April 2020**

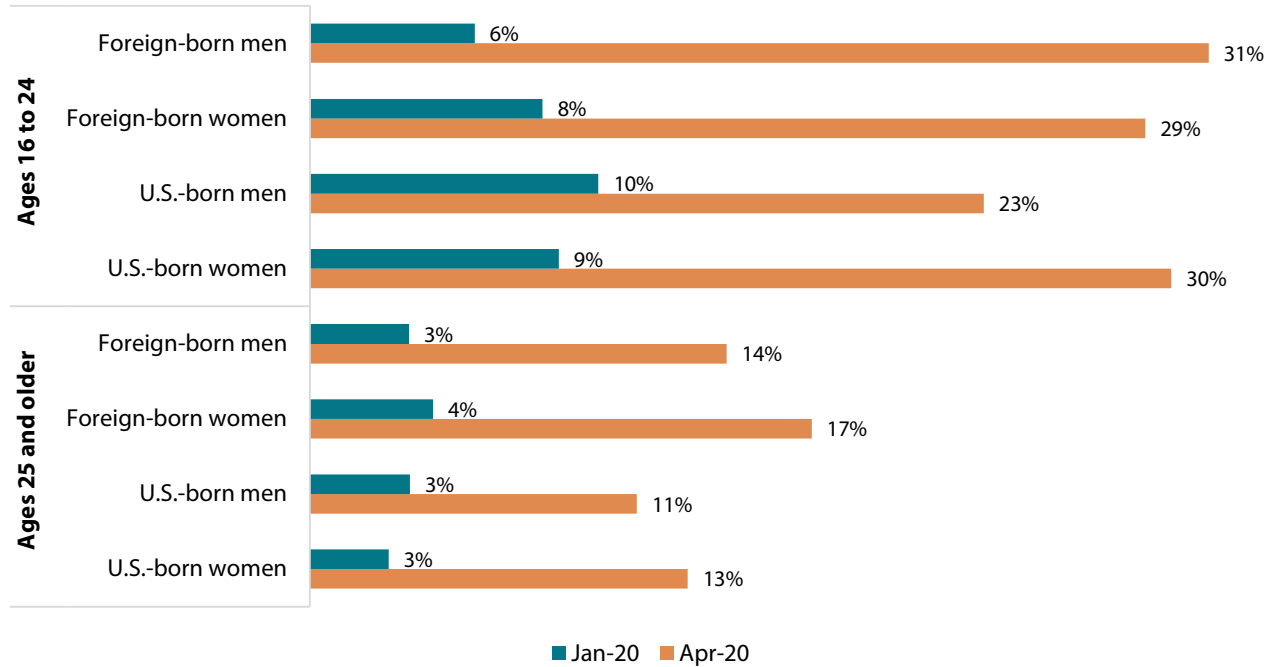


Source: MPI analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's January 2020 and April 2020 monthly CPS.



FIGURE 11

**Unemployment Rates of Adults in the U.S. Civilian Labor Force, by Age, Nativity, and Gender, January-April 2020**



Source: MPI analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s January 2020 and April 2020 monthly CPS.

Within the group of young adults ages 16 to 24, immigrant men had the highest unemployment rate in April (31 percent). Before the pandemic, in January, they had the lowest jobless rate (see Figure 11). The increase in their unemployment rate (25 percentage points) was about twice that for U.S.-born young men (13 percent points). Among workers over age 25, however, immigrant women had the highest unemployment rate in April and the largest increase since January (see Figure 11).

## 6 Unemployment Trends by Industry

While pandemic-related job losses were most heavily concentrated in nonessential service industries requiring face-to-face interaction, they occurred across the economy and affected every major racial/

ethnic group. Within almost every major group of industries, unemployment rates were nearly as high for U.S.-born workers as for immigrants—suggesting that all workers have been greatly affected by which jobs are deemed essential or can be performed at home versus those requiring travel to workplaces.

In January, before the pandemic, there was little variation in unemployment rates by industry group, with rates at or below 5 percent for both immigrants and U.S.-born workers in every sector (see Table 1). Immigrants and natives had similar unemployment rates in almost all industries. A notable exception was agriculture, in which 15 percent of immigrant men and 30 percent of immigrant women were unemployed at that time, reflecting strong seasonal trends in the agriculture industry, which employs fewer people in the winter.

By April, unemployment had dramatically increased in every industry except agriculture. Five sectors had overall unemployment rates below 10 percent: mining, manufacturing, finance, health services, and public administration. Unemployment approached 20 percent in retail trade and 40 percent in leisure and hospitality<sup>16</sup>—both industries hard hit by the closure of nonessential businesses such as restaurants, retail stores, hotels and other lodging, and arts, entertainment, and recreation venues.<sup>17</sup>

In April, immigrant workers fared about as well as U.S.-born workers in almost all industries. Their unemployment rates were within 3 percentage points of each other in all major industry groups except transportation (11 points), agriculture (6 points), other services (5 points), and wholesale trade (4 points). Thus, higher unemployment among immi-

grants is more a function of the industries in which they work than other characteristics that might affect their jobs within industries. This is particularly true for the hardest-hit industries of retail trade and leisure and hospitality.

Immigrant women, however, fared considerably worse than immigrant men in four of the service industries: professional services, health services, educational and social assistance services, and personal and other services. These industries include subgroups of predominantly female professions, such as teaching, child care, domestic work, and other personal services, that experienced among the steepest job losses in April.<sup>18</sup> Though immigrant women had the highest unemployment rates in these industries, joblessness was also higher for U.S.-born women than U.S.-born men.

**TABLE 1**  
**Unemployment Rates for Adults (ages 16 and older), by Nativity, Gender, and Major Industry of Employment, January-April 2020**

	All Immigrants	All U.S. Born	Immigrant Men	Immigrant Women	U.S.-Born Men	U.S.-Born Women
<i>January 2020</i>						
Agriculture	19.5%	6.2%	14.6%	29.9%	6.0%	6.8%
Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	0.2%	2.7%	0.3%	0.0%	2.4%	4.6%
Construction	4.9%	5.5%	5.0%	3.0%	5.5%	5.2%
Manufacturing	3.0%	3.5%	2.7%	3.5%	3.3%	4.2%
Wholesale trade	3.6%	3.0%	4.0%	3.1%	3.2%	2.8%
Retail trade	5.2%	5.0%	3.3%	7.4%	4.2%	5.8%
Transportation and utilities	1.2%	3.3%	0.9%	2.6%	3.4%	2.9%
Information	1.7%	2.4%	1.5%	2.0%	1.5%	3.8%
Financial activities	2.4%	2.8%	2.3%	2.5%	2.7%	3.0%
Professional and business services	4.0%	3.9%	3.4%	5.0%	4.6%	3.0%
Education and social assistance services	2.8%	2.4%	4.8%	2.0%	3.2%	2.0%
Health services	1.2%	2.0%	0.9%	1.3%	1.9%	2.0%
Leisure and hospitality	4.0%	6.4%	2.7%	5.5%	7.1%	5.9%
Public administration	1.5%	2.1%	2.9%	0.0%	1.9%	2.3%
Personal and other services	3.3%	3.7%	3.9%	2.8%	4.2%	3.3%

TABLE 1 (cont.)

**Unemployment Rates for Adults (ages 16 and older), by Nativity, Gender, and Major Industry of Employment, January-April 2020**

	All Immigrants	All U.S. Born	Immigrant Men	Immigrant Women	U.S.-Born Men	U.S.-Born Women
<i>April 2020</i>						
Agriculture	11.6%	5.5%	6.9%	25.9%	6.6%	2.6%
Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	7.9%	10.2%	11.0%	0.0%	10.2%	10.5%
Construction	16.8%	15.1%	17.2%	9.9%	15.4%	12.8%
Manufacturing	13.0%	13.1%	12.7%	13.6%	12.8%	13.8%
Wholesale trade	12.5%	8.8%	14.3%	7.2%	8.2%	10.5%
Retail trade	19.8%	17.9%	18.3%	21.4%	14.9%	21.0%
Transportation and utilities	20.8%	10.2%	20.5%	22.2%	9.4%	12.6%
Information	11.7%	12.1%	13.8%	6.9%	12.1%	12.1%
Financial activities	6.0%	5.3%	4.4%	7.7%	5.1%	5.6%
Professional and business services	10.5%	9.4%	7.7%	14.6%	8.4%	11.0%
Education and social assistance services	15.7%	14.3%	10.8%	17.8%	12.1%	15.1%
Health services	8.1%	8.1%	4.6%	9.5%	5.3%	8.9%
Leisure and hospitality	39.1%	37.6%	39.9%	38.1%	36.0%	39.1%
Public administration	3.8%	4.8%	2.3%	5.2%	4.2%	5.3%
Personal and other services	26.0%	21.1%	17.5%	33.6%	15.8%	25.6%

Source: MPI analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s January 2020 and April 2020 monthly CPS.

As lockdowns and social-distancing restrictions are being relaxed, some jobs may return in the worst-affected industries, such as leisure and hospitality—reducing some of the differences in unemployment rates between immigrants and natives. Such trends would repeat the pattern MPI analysts observed following the 2008-09 recession, when employment rebounded more quickly for immigrants than for U.S.-born workers because immigrants were more likely to hold jobs in industries such as construction, hospitality, and retail trade that were strongly affected by the business cycle.

## 7 Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic and associated shutdowns and mobility restrictions imposed at various levels of government across the United States resulted in historic job losses across the economy beginning in March and continuing into April and beyond. Unemployment, which officially stood at about 15 percent at this writing, was anticipated to rise as high as 25 percent—a level unseen since the worst days of the Great Depression.

At the moment, immigrants, and especially Latino immigrants, have been especially hard hit by this economic crisis. Part of the explanation is the younger age and lower educational attainment of immigrant workers. All workers without a high school education, regardless of nativity, are facing sharp increases in unemployment, even as joblessness has also risen among high school graduates and those with a college education. Unemployment rose among all age groups, but it was twice as high in April for workers under age 25 as for those age 25 and older—a reality for both immigrants and natives. These patterns are similar to those noted during the 2008-09 recession.

Unlike that recession, the current economic freefall is affecting women much more than men. Except for Black immigrant women, women in every major racial/ethnic and nativity group are experiencing higher unemployment and lower labor force participation than men. The group most affected—Latina immigrants—has the highest unemployment rate of any group, at 22 percent. With such high unemployment and a low labor force participation rate, just 38 percent of working-age Latina immigrants were employed in April. Within key service sectors such as education and health, both immigrant and native women were substantially more likely to be unemployed than their male counterparts.

Perhaps the most important finding from the work, however, is that higher unemployment among immigrants is primarily driven by the industries in

which they work. Within most of the major industry groups, unemployment rates were almost as high for natives as for immigrants. But immigrants were more likely to work in the most affected industries such as retail trade and leisure and hospitality.

These findings have important implications for the well-being of immigrant families. Like many families in the United States, immigrant families are experiencing massive job loss and—when still employed—potentially fewer hours, lower earnings, and uncertainty about the future. Latino immigrant families are often single-earner families, and this has become even more pronounced as the employment rate for Latinas dropped precipitously during this crisis. In such families, the threat of additional job losses could bring high economic uncertainty and great pressure for those still employed to continue to work despite the dangers of exposure to the coronavirus.

Whether these high levels of joblessness and employment gaps by race, ethnicity, nativity, age, and gender continue over the long run is highly uncertain. While it took several years for unemployment rates to return to historic averages after the 2008-09 recession, they did so faster for Latino immigrants than for U.S.-born workers. Whether unemployment drops and immigrants can quickly regain parity with natives will depend on the pandemic's trajectory, changes in state and local social-distancing rules, the job market's response, and the effectiveness of government stimulus policies—all unknowable factors at the present time.

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*Higher unemployment among immigrants is primarily driven by the industries in which they work.*

## Endnotes

- 1 Tony Romm, “Americans Have Filed More than 40 Million Jobless Claims in Past 10 Weeks, As Another 2.1 Million Filed for Benefits Last Week,” *Washington Post*, May 28, 2020; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), “Unemployment Insurance Weekly Claims” (news release, May 28, 2020).
- 2 The 14.7 percent rate was the seasonally adjusted rate, while the unadjusted rate was 14.4 percent; the estimates provided in this fact sheet for different groups of workers are not seasonally adjusted.
- 3 Hayley Miller, “Steve Mnuchin: Actual U.S. Unemployment Rate ‘Could Be’ Close To 25%,” *HuffPost*, May 20, 2020.
- 4 Demetrios G. Papademetriou, Madeleine Sumption, and Aaron Terrazas, *Migration and Immigrants Two Years after the Financial Collapse: Where Do We Stand?* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2010), 28-33.
- 5 Julia Gelatt, *Immigrant Workers: Vital to the U.S. COVID-19 Response, Disproportionately Vulnerable* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2020), 7.
- 6 BLS, “Table B-1. Employees on Nonfarm Payrolls by Industry Sector and Selected Industry Detail” (news release, May 11, 2020).
- 7 Gelatt, *Immigrant Workers: Vital to the U.S. COVID-19 Response, Disproportionately Vulnerable*, 2.
- 8 BLS, “Table B-1.”
- 9 Migration Policy Institute (MPI) researchers use the U.S. Census Bureau’s definition of the foreign and U.S. born. The term “foreign born” (used interchangeably here with “immigrant”) refers to people residing in the United States at the time of the population survey who were not U.S. citizens at birth. This population includes naturalized U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents (or green-card holders), refugees and asylees, certain legal nonimmigrants (including those on student, work, or other temporary visas), and persons residing in the country without authorization. The term “U.S. born” refers to people residing in the United States who were U.S. citizens in one of three categories: people born in one of the 50 states or the District of Columbia; those born in U.S. Insular Areas such as Puerto Rico or Guam; or those were born abroad to at least one U.S.-citizen parent. Note that the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) defines the term “foreign born” slightly differently; the agency includes persons born in Puerto Rico and other outlying territories to noncitizen parents in the “foreign born” category. For this reason, the estimates by nativity in this fact sheet are slightly different from those of BLS.
- 10 COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020. See WHO, “WHO Director-General’s Opening Remarks at the Media Briefing on COVID-19 — 11 March 2020” (speech, March 11, 2020).
- 11 The unemployment rate is the percentage of unemployed people in the civilian labor force, which is comprised of civilian adults ages 16 and older who were either working or seeking employment during the week preceding the survey.
- 12 Papademetriou, Sumption, and Terrazas, *Migration and Immigrants Two Years after the Financial Collapse*, 35.
- 13 The labor force participation rate is the percentage of all civilian adults ages 16 and older who were either working or seeking employment during the week preceding the survey.
- 14 BLS, “Employment Situation Summary.”
- 15 Latinos can be of any race. The other racial groups refer to non-Latinos. Black refers to persons who reported their race as “Black alone” or “Black in combination with other race.” Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) refers to persons who reported their race as “AAPI alone” or “AAPI in combination with other race,” except Black. White refers to persons who reported their race as “White.” The remainder is a small group called “other races,” which includes people who reported their race as “American Indian alone,” “American Indian and White,” or unspecified multiracial. Estimates for this group are not shown in this fact sheet due to the small sample size.
- 16 “Leisure and hospitality” include art, entertainment, accommodation, and food services.
- 17 There was likely substantial variation in unemployment among subsectors within these industries (for instance, food and beverage stores within retail trade), but the U.S. Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey (CPS) sample was insufficient to assess unemployment in these smaller categories.
- 18 BLS, “Table B-1.”

## About the Authors



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Randy Capps is Director of Research for U.S. Programs at the Migration Policy Institute (MPI). His areas of expertise include immigration trends, the unauthorized population, immigrants in the U.S. labor force, the children of immigrants and their wellbeing, and immigrant health-care and public benefits access and use. Dr. Capps, a demographer, has published widely on immigrant integration at the state and local level, and examined the impact of the detention and deportation of immigrant parents on children.

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